

Building Resilience: One Step at a Time

Second Victims: They need help too

When a medical error occurs, the patient is the first victim. Still, the shame and guilt experienced by the medical provider following the events causes the provider to fall victim as well.

What does “second victim” mean?

- The term “second victim” was coined by Albert Wu, MD, an internist at The Johns Hopkins Hospital in 2000, and refers to the guilt and shame a healthcare provider feels after a medical error occurs.
- Medical providers then become torn about whether to confront their mistakes. This serious internal conflict can often result in moral injury.
- Supporting providers is an essential aspect of patient care because healthy providers will deliver more effective care and treatment.

What could a second victim look like?

- Feeling judged by others
- Low morale
- Second-guessing self
- Withdrawn
- Quick to anger

How to support a second victim

1. Encourage your colleague to talk about what happened and do not minimize the importance of mistake.
2. Offer personal experiences , so the colleague does not feel isolated without minimizing their experience.
3. Ask about the emotional impact of the mistake and how they are dealing with it.
4. Acknowledge how it will be difficult to tell the patient or family of the mistake if they do not already know, but explain to your colleague that they will feel relief.
5. Emphasize the importance of being empathetic and apologetic during this conversation.
6. Create space for your colleague to talk about how they feel and offer them resources about the “second victim” phenomenon and moral injury.
7. Make sure facility protocols are in place to support and provide resources for impacted staff.

Additional resources

- [Moral injury in the healthcare field](#)
- [University Health Network- Toronto video addressing hospital mistakes](#)
- [Article explaining about second victim](#)